



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

ADDRESS OF WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, CHAIR-
MAN OF THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL COMMISSION,
IN PRESENTING THE MEMORIAL TO THE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
MAY 30, 1922.



Mr. PRESIDENT:

The American people have waited fifty-seven years for a national memorial to Abraham Lincoln. Those years have faded the figures of his contemporaries, and he stands grandly alone. His life and character in the calmer and juster vista of half a century inspire a higher conception of what is suitable to commemorate him.

Justice, truth, patience, mercy, and love of his kind, simplicity, courage, sacrifice, and confidence in God were his moral qualities. Clarity of thought and intellectual honesty, self-analysis and strong inexorable logic, supreme common sense, a sympathetic but unerring knowledge of human nature, imagination and limpid purity of style, with a poetic rhythm of the Psalms—these were his intellectual and cultural traits. His soul and heart and brain and mind had all these elements, but their union in him had a setting that

baffles description. His humility, his self-abnegation and devotion, his patience under grievous disappointment, his agony of spirit in the burden he had to carry, his constant sadness, lightened at intervals with a rare humor all his own, the abuse and ridicule of which he was the subject, his endurance in a great cause of small obstructive minds, his domestic sorrows, and finally his tragic end, form the story of a passion and give him a personality that is vivid in the hearts of the people as if it were but yesterday. We feel a closer touch with him than with living men. The influence he still wields, one may say with all reverence, has a Christ-like character. It has spread to the four quarters of the globe. The oppressed and lowly of all peoples, as liberty and free government spread, pronounce his name with awe, and cherish his assured personal sympathy as a source of hope. Their leaders quote ~~his~~ his glowing words of patient courage, of sympathy with the down-trodden, of dependence on God's wisdom and justice, and of his never-ceasing prayer for liberty through the rule of the people. The harmony of his message with every popular aspiration for freedom proves his universality. It was this which Stanton was inspired to

predict when, as Lincoln lay dead, he said, "He now belongs to the ages."

His own life without favoring chance in preparation for the task which Providence was to put on him, his early humble surroundings, his touch with the soil, his oneness with the plain people, and the wonder that out of these he could become what he was and is, give us a soul stirring pride that the world has come to know him and to love him as we do. We like to dwell on the fact that his associates did not see him as he was when on earth, and that it was for generations, born after he was gone, to feel his real greatness and to be moved by his real personality. Not with the lowly only, but with all, rich or poor, ignorant or learned, weak or powerful, untutored or of literary genius, has this aura about Lincoln's head at his death grown into a halo of living light.

Therefore it is well that half a century should pass before his people's national tribute to him takes form in marble, that it should wait until a generation instinct with the growing and deepening perception of the real Lincoln has had time to develop an art adequate to the expression of his greatness.

The years immediately following the Civil War were not favorable to art, and the re-

mains of that period in our capital city and elsewhere show it. But new impulses in the expansion of our country's energies were soon directed toward better things. Our expositions have marked the steps in that progress. They called together men who had been struggling singly to practice, preach and bring home to us real conceptions of art and beauty in architecture and sculpture. For fifteen years following the Centennial at Philadelphia, the nucleus there begun grew until at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1892 and 1893, there were gathered a group of artists who in the development of civic planning, landscape architecture and monumental and sculptural beauty were the peers of any. Burnham, McKim, Olmstead the elder, Saint Gaudens, Atwood and Millet were the leading figures. In 1894, they organized the American Academy in Rome for the graduate education of American students, where before entering upon their professional careers they should study thoroughly that reservoir of Greek art, the greatest of antiquity, which is at Rome, where "the noble buildings are a forest, the animals of bronze, a herd; the statues, a population in marble."

In 1901, under the generous and far seeing favor of James McMillan, in charge in the Senate of the affairs of the District of Columbia, a commission was appointed to bridge over the period between Washington and L'Enfant's plan for the capital, and on the basis of that plan to enlarge and give greater scope to the beauty of this seat of government. The four men who engaged in this work were, three of them, the creators of the "Court of Honor" and the "White City" at the Columbian Exposition, and the fourth, the younger Olmstead, was worthy of his sire. As a new feature in that plan, and referring to the place upon which we stand, they said in their report:

Crowning the *rond-point*, as the Arc de Triomphe crowns the Place de L'Etoile at Paris, should stand a memorial erected to the memory of that one man in our history as a nation who is worthy to be named with George Washington—Abraham Lincoln. Whatever may be the exact form selected for the memorial to Lincoln, in type it should possess the quality of universality, and also it should have a character essentially different from that of any monument either now existing in the District or hereafter to be erected.

The type which the Commission has in mind is a great portico of Doric columns rising from an unbroken stylobate. This portico, while affording a point of vantage from which one obtains a commanding outlook, both upon the river and eastward to the Capitol, has for its chief function to support a panel bearing an inscription taken either from the Gettysburg speech or from some one of the immortal messages of the savior of the Union.

Here, then, was the first conception of the Memorial we dedicate to-day. Not until 1911 was the idea carried forward. Then two sons of Illinois, Shelby Cullom and Joseph G. Cannon, fathered the bill for the creation of the present commission, under whose official supervision this work has been done. The Commission claims no credit for it except that it asked those who knew what to do, and did it. They consulted the Fine Arts Commission, made up of Burnham, Millet, Olmstead, French, Hastings, Gilbert, and Moore, who urged the present site and recommended as the man to design and build it Henry Bacon, the student and disciple of McKim. McKim was the dean of the architects of this country, and did most among us to bring the art of

Greece to appreciation and noble use. Bacon has been his worthy successor.

For 10 years the structure has been rising. From the solid rock beneath the level of the Potomac, 50 feet below the original grade, it reaches a total of 122 feet above that grade. The platform at its base is 204 feet long and 134 feet wide. ~~The colonnade is 188 feet long and 118 feet wide, the columns 44 feet high and 7 feet 5 inches in diameter at their base. The memorial hall is 156 feet long and 84 feet wide. The central hall, where the statue stands, is 60 feet wide, 70 feet long, and 60 feet high.~~ The proportions of the memorial are so fine that its great mass and height and length and breadth are suppressed in its unity. The outside columns are the simple Doric, the inside columns the simple Ionic. The marble of the structure is from the Colorado Yule mine, remarkable for its texture and the purity of its white, and for the size of the drums which make the columns noteworthy in the architecture of the world.

The colossal figure of the Beloved in Georgia marble, the work of another of the group of artists of whom I have spoken, Daniel French, one of our greatest sculptors, fills the memorial hall with an overwhelming sense of Lincoln's

presence, while the mural decorations of another great American artist Guerin, with their all-embracing allegory, crown the whole sacred place.

The site is at the end of the axis of the Mall, the commanding and noteworthy spine of the L'Enfant plan. Burnham, McKim, and Saint Gaudens, who followed this plan through to its triumph, took the Mall under their peculiar protection. It was they who caused that wonderful bronze group of the Silent Soldier and his battling armies to be put upon this axis at the foot of the Capitol, which he who did so much to defend. It was they who struggled against encroachments upon this capital feature of our wonderful seat of government. It was they who put this noble structure we celebrate to-day where it is. They sought the judgment of John Hay, secretary and biographer of Lincoln, statesman and poet. He answered:

The place of honor is on the main axis of the plan. Lincoln, of all Americans next to Washington, deserves this place of honor. He was of the immortals. You must not approach too close to the immortals. His monument should stand alone, remote from the common habitations of man, apart from the business

and turmoil of the city—isolated, distinguished, and serene. Of all the sites, this one, near the Potomac, is most suited to the purpose.

And now, Mr. President, the ideal of these great American artists has found expression in the memorial as you see it. It is a magnificent gem set in a lovely valley between the hills, commanding them by its isolation and its entrancing beauty, an emblem of the purity of the best period of the Greek art in the simple Doric, the culmination of the highest art of which America is capable, and therefore fit to commemorate a people's love for the Nation's savior and its greatest leader.

Here on the banks of the Potomac, the boundary between the two sections, whose conflict made the burden, passion and triumph of his life, it is peculiarly appropriate that it should stand. Visible in its distant beauty from the Capitol, whose great dome typifies the Union which he saved, seen in all its grandeur from Arlington, where lie the Nation's honored dead who fell in the conflict, Union and Confederate alike, it marks the restoration of the brotherly love of the two sections in this memorial of one who is as dear to the hearts of the South as to those of the North. The

Southerner knows that the greatest misfortune in all the trials of that section was the death of Lincoln. Had he lived, the consequences of the war would not have been as hard for them to bear, the wounds would have been more easily healed, the trying days of reconstruction would have been softened. Rancor and resentment were no part of his nature. In all the bitterness of that conflict, no word fell from his lips, tried as he was, which told of hatred, malice or unforgiving soul. Here is a shrine at which all can worship. Here an altar upon which the ~~sacrifice~~ sacrifice was made in the cause of Liberty. Here a sacred religious refuge in which those who love country and love God can find inspiration and repose.

Mr. President, in the name of the Commission, I have the honor to deliver this Lincoln Memorial into your keeping.



